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COUNTING OUR ASSETS

Religious teachers are always tempted to magnify the evils of society. The literature of moral idealism is a continuous lamentation upon the sins of contemporaries and the virtues of our ancestors. We are still urged to restore the olden-time honesty of fathers, the modesty of mothers, the filial piety of sons, and the domestic faithfulness of daughters. Men and women have to be dead at least two generations before they can be regarded as saints.

Particularly is this true in a day that finds itself startled by a terrible war. Just why we should be so surprised that Christian nations should fight each other is hard to say. They have always fought—and fought bitterly. If the Puritans did not kill as many people at the same time as can our modern artillery, it was not because of any lack of desire. The spirit was willing but the ammunition was weak.

We may very easily paint the present situation, like all moralists, in too dark colors. Civilization has not collapsed. Millions of men are fighting each other, but vastly more members of the same nations are going about their daily business. Schools and universities, hospitals, libraries, the institutions of charity, family loyalty, respect for property rights, and even a desire to apologize for being at war, have not disappeared. Certain soldiers have yielded to the backward pull of war and have turned primeval savage, but the same is true, though less openly, in times of peace. Men's passions find vent in battle, but they also find vent in other ways when there is no war.

What really has happened is that we have discovered that internationalism has not been Christianized.

Yet even this is too pessimistic a statement.

There never was a time when the peace movement was so strong as at the present moment.

There never was a time when more sensible and promising efforts were made to outlaw war.

There never was a time when Christian leaders have less championed war. The very fact that Christianity is blamed for permitting a war to exist, and that the church is condemned for not bringing the war to a close, is evidence that the world is taking Christianity and the church more seriously than ever before.



Is it conceivable that on the Continent of Europe there could be waged today the Wars of Religion which followed the Reformation? Is it conceivable that the churches of Great Britain could today oppose each other in persecution and battle as in the seventeenth century? Is it conceivable that those who are opposed to war should be persecuted today as were the early Quakers?

While we recognize the awfulness of the present world-struggle, and while we uncompromisingly seek to make war a matter of archaeology, let us not overlook the solid accomplishments of the Christian spirit. It is only sensible to realize that we cannot make men over again in a moment. We can change their moral attitude rapidly but not the social ideas which determine the operations of their moral life. The man who cannot realize that there has been a definite and steady rise of the tide of morality since Professor John Hus was burned alive at the behest of churchmen is threatened with melancholia.



We have not made the world into the Kingdom of God, but we have made it much less the kingdom of Satan. God's will is not done on earth as it is in heaven, but God is much better obeyed than He ever was before.

God has not left his world and the world has not left its God. There are tares in the field but there is more good seed.

Let us count our liabilities if we must, but as sensible folk let us count our assets as well.